

Year Review 2025–26



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Called to be a
community of
mercy and kindness

Team Rector's Report

Firstly, I wish to thank most warmly all members of the Ministry Team, for a year of generous and committed service to the Benefice, and ongoing welcome and support to myself and Andy. A particular thanks is due to our Parish Wardens, Jeremy Lasman and Kate Banks, who have continued to serve the Benefice with great love, care and devotion. Jeremy, who has furthermore served as Warden and Treasurer in recent years, will step down at this APCM as Parish Warden. I wish to thank him wholeheartedly for his comprehensive generosity; I am delighted that he will continue to serve as Treasurer, even as he steps back as Warden.

Every PCC needs a committed PCC Secretary, and the Parish and Rector are truly blessed in Kate Lockwood, whose generous attention to detail and rigour is exemplary. My thanks also to Chris Dingwall-Jones, whose work as Associate Vicar encompasses liturgical expertise and beauty, creative flair, academic rigour and pastoral sensitivity; we await his forthcoming academic book with anticipation; to our kind Associate Priests, Mark Thomas and Mark Bezeera Speeks, alongside Joanna Collicutt and Tina Rollings, who have continued to minister with generosity across the Benefice; and to Jackie Bone, ecumenical Partner, whose energetic and creative oversight of the Windrush Community brings it from strength to strength.

Our St Mary's Director of Music, Francis Rumsey, has been offering music of the highest quality for fifteen years; he has made the decision to adjust his service at the end of this summer. We hope that he will remain as one of our organists, and we thank him for the exceptionally rich musical provision which he has given us over these years. We are grateful to Paul Francis who continues as Holy Trinity's Director of Music, and to all who enhance our worship by playing the organ and singing in the choirs.

Alongside the generous work of the Ministry Team, Michelle, our administrator, continues to give invaluable support and oversight of our systems; and the PCC and several DCCs have also continued to guide the Benefice and support upkeep of our churches with care and wisdom. Our curate James Elward, having taken time on shared parental leave from January–September, was due to undertake a placement outside the Benefice for developmental work, from which to complete his curacy, but this has been delayed. We wish James well when he moves forward in his curacy training. We continue to pray for Dave Pizzey and Rebecca Coatsworth, both undertaking training for ordained ministry, and for Kate Banks, who has recently been approved to explore and begin some training for locally deployed ordained ministry, from next autumn. Kate has kindly agreed to stand for re-election as Parish Warden, in the shorter term. But our wardens would not be able to serve as they do without invaluable support by a team of deputies, who are in many cases supporting the daily work and smooth functioning of churches across the Benefice. Andy Brown is stepping back from St Mary's with our warm thanks; Ash is happy to stand for another year and I thank him for his

service. Charlotte Tremain continues to serve Holy Trinity with dedication, good humour, generosity and competence, and Kirsty Morgan combines serving Hailey faithfully and effectively with her ongoing Schools Chaplain role. I am delighted she has agreed to stand for election to succeed Jeremy as Parish Warden. Ian has also kindly agreed to stand for re-election in Curbridge and we are very grateful to him here as well, as we begin to discern how the Spirit may be directing us in St John's. Grateful thanks also go to Linda Taft and Sue Hodges who are stepping back after years of generous service on Deanery Synod and the PCC. Linda has done sterling work on the volunteer rota at SMV as well. And alongside Wardens and Deputies, our Safeguarding Officers, Alison Spicer and Sarah-Jane Ebanja, supported by Kate Lockwood, perform a crucial and valued service in working with myself and the PCC to make our churches safe and welcoming places, and my thanks goes to Alison, Sarah-Jane and Kate for this generous service too.

Meanwhile, Kirsty Morgan and Andy Sparkes have been undertaking training for authorised preaching, and Jeremy continues to offer preaching as well. Richard Young has stepped back from the PCC but continues to bless the Benefice in many ways, not only in preaching and officiating, but also assisting us with many aspects of our IT coverage, essential for increasingly complex modes of communication across the Benefice, and most recently, with the writing and publication of a new and excellent guide and history to St Mary's (available for the very reasonable sum of £5 for parish funds).

Following a Ministry Team away day in July 2025, we have been building on an adjusted sense of Benefice priorities, while also cementing focus established previously on our Values and Pillars: we recommitted to Daily Prayer, Eucharist, Hospitality and Inclusiveness as central to our ministry in the Benefice of Witney, and we discussed different ways of taking these forward. One of our ongoing priorities, especially following the departure of our Youth Worker after four years of paid service in the Benefice, was to find ways of further taking forward ministry among children and young people. This ministry aligns with a diocesan and national church priority, and I have been asked by the Bishop to take part in a



national programme of training in these areas across the year. Currently, engagement in this area falls into several different areas, one, developing ministry and presence in Benefice schools. Kirsty Morgan kindly agreed to take oversight of this forward, alongside ordained and other colleagues also serving in this ministry. Existing links have been supported, and in many cases renewed and strengthened; new areas of ministry have also opened up, both in new schools (for example, in Tower Hill) and in new areas (for example, Prayer Space ministry both in school contexts and in SMV). These have proved popular and beneficial. We have also continued to support weekly Junior Church ministry in SMV, thanks to a generous team. This needs further support to enable busy parents to receive and worship more frequently, rather than to serve, as often as currently they do. A Breakfast Church initiative in Windrush Church has been developed, with Jacky and Chris leading, and this has proved popular and a source of welcome growth. Alongside the Windrush Choir initiative, this has also contributed to the development of a group undertaking an Alpha course. Alongside these areas, and also her ongoing ministry in the College, and new ministry in Henry Box School, Dianne Augustine has also developed a weekly Youth Café initiative in the Winchester Room, currently supported by funding from different grant sources, among them, Witney Town Council. This has been well attended and having run as a Pilot scheme during the Spring term, the hope is that funding may be found to support it in the future as well; we would welcome suggestions or offers as to how this might be supported. Plans are also in motion for application to fund a Youth Choir director, to be deployed across the Benefice. This choir would support a group of young people, meeting initially on a Sunday afternoon or perhaps evening, and their families, and offer training in Anglican music and liturgy of different kinds, as well potentially creating a new community/congregation.

Reaching out in new ways to those currently under-represented in our Sunday services, also connects with the wide work of outreach, which plays a significant part in our Benefice ministry and supports our values of Hospitality and



Inclusiveness. We reach out in very many different ways, but Festivals continue to play an important part, Beer and Food and Drink particularly; last year, we contributed a presence to the Witney Pride witness and will this year add a time of prayer and reflection to this witness on the Leys. Playing a part in the Witney Feast continues also to figure, despite poor weather this year; also, sharing in civic events (among them Remembrance Day, VJ Day, Citizen of the Year, Annual Council Meeting, Mayor's Carol Service) and shared services with local charities, (such as this year, One Wish Dog Foundation etc). Our outreach is also enriched by extensive links with local Care Homes, overseen by our Anna Chaplain team. After some years of giving much time and skilled care to this, Julia Bee has decided not to renew her license at the end of July, but to continue with her authorised funeral ministry. We are enormously grateful to her for all she has brought to this important work. We are glad that Dave Pizzey, when he is ordained Distinctive Deacon in July, will reengage with this work as a part of his curacy ministry.

Alongside a commitment to youth and children's ministry, other priorities of course obtain. Stewardship continues to be a demanding aspect of our lives in the Parish both of our giving – towards our Parish Share – and towards upkeep of our church buildings, several of which have received a Quinquennial report which indicates the need for increased fabric spending and attention. I therefore invited a stewardship group to consider ways of covering running costs in a more sustainable way, chaired by Andy Sparkes. This group has made a number of initiatives with this end in view, and continues to address the need for our running costs to be met by worshipping communities within the Parish. Of course, fundraising for DCC fabric work also continues across the Parish. In St Mary's, Eileen and Jenny have offered another wonderful year of events with this in view, including concerts, most recently, the Schools Concert, which was a magnificent and joyful event. Holy Trinity has similarly coordinated some equally fruitful and enjoyable initiatives for fabric support, coffee mornings among them. Alongside this, a group is being formed to respond to the objectives of the Quinquennial report for SMV, for which considerable and separate fundraising will be needed in the next few years.

Environmental engagement continues to be an important focus and strand of our witness and ministry. I am grateful to the Benefice Environment Group for its ongoing work, engagement, prayer and teaching. A monthly Vigil for the Earth has been held in SMV, alongside a vigil to mark Earth Overshoot Day; a month of creation-oriented preaching and liturgy was offered in SMV in September to mark this season; and alongside this, new groups have sprung up in HT and continued in Hailey to engage with the challenge of climate crisis. This is a welcome development, and the example set by the BEG has been inspiring. Across the year, arduous work has also been put into the question of Net Zero by Kate and Jeremy, and consideration given to what could be done with heating and insulation in SMV; advice was received and the DCC continues to reflect on possible ways forward.

A further aspect of our engagement continues, of course, to be Pastoral care. Among four groups set up within the Team, a Benefice-wide Pastoral Care group was put together, chaired by Liz Johnson for much of the year, until she stepped back from Ministry Team responsibilities, to enjoy a little more well-deserved relaxation. The group has met a number of times and established some priorities, not least the offering of a more regular Healing with Prayer within the SMV Eucharist. One such was offered subsequently and with considerable benefit experienced, such that it was agreed this would be repeated. Coordinating a pastoral representative across the Benefice in each church able to attend a regular meeting has proved more challenging, so this focus has been stepped down, with the ongoing meeting primarily attended by those involved with pastoral care in SMV. Here several new volunteers for pastoral ministry have offered themselves for service, which is much appreciated. This runs in tandem with Julia Bee, Anna Chaplain, making the decision not to renew her Anna Chaplain licence beyond July, but to remain in authorised funeral ministry. With the training of Rebecca Coatsworth and Dave Pizzey, the Anna Chaplain team has been less well supported in this last year. When Dave returns to undertake his curacy as a Designated Deacon in Witney Benefice, we hope that he will be able to reengage with this important area, but we register warm thanks to Julia for all she has given and undertaken (not least overseeing the Anna Chaplain team for a season) and we wish her well in her slightly less engaged 'retirement' from this particular ministry. We continue to offer regular Eucharists and Services of the Word in quite a number of Care Homes, and personal visits also continue alongside such.

One of the ongoing priorities in Witney Benefice continues to be a ministry of teaching and spirituality, as an arm of our welcome and hospitality. Since my arrival, a teaching and learning weekly session has been offered, initially specifically for asylum seekers. Many of these have become committed members of our community in SMV, even after they have left Witney for their more permanent abode. The teaching session then developed into a discussion group meeting across the autumn, focusing on different topics but Bible study among them; and then a Lent Group was offered, to explore the understanding of the Eucharist (with focus on Ritual, the Bible, Confession, Intercession, Sacrament, and other topics), led by Chris and Mark Bezeera Speeks alongside myself. These proved to be lively and informative sessions, where questions and uncertainties were explored alongside input on many areas. Latterly, this has replaced Talking Theology as a focus for such. As said, other opportunities for learning have been offered, e.g. Windrush Alpha course, and also individual meetings for baptism or Confirmation preparation.

A benefice as busy as ours can only function because of the hard work and dedication of many people who work behind the scenes or more visibly, and my thanks go to everyone for contributing their time and talents.

Revd Dr Hester Jones, Rector

Benefice Strategy

The vision of the Parish continues to be that we should be a community of mercy and kindness. Our strategy is summarised in the diagram below:



In January 2025, we were delighted to welcome Rev Dr Hester Jones as our new Team Rector. We have greatly valued her exceptional work ethic, considered approach and compassionate active listening as she has engaged with not only the many and varied activities across the Parish but has also taken time to support so many individuals.

At a summer away day, the Ministry Team was asked to reflect on our vision and strategy as outlined above. Although we agreed it was still appropriate, a number of actions came out of that meeting to give certain priority areas greater focus.

As such, the structure of our weekly Ministry team meetings has evolved, to allow for one session per month to be dedicated to the following:

- Outreach and Youth Ministry (including schools)
- Worship, Liturgy and Junior Church
- Pastoral Care and Support of Older people
- Strategy review

This approach, while still in its relative infancy, has enabled more substantive discussions to take place and has also had the benefit of widening those involved in each area beyond the membership of the leadership team.

Separate focus groups are either in place or are being formed to lead on other priority areas, e.g. the Benefice Environment group.

Greater detail of the continued wide-ranging work of the Benefice, both in nurturing our worshipping communities and in playing an active and valued role in the life of our town can be found in our Annual Review.

We remain hugely grateful for the commitment and care of our two stipendiary priests, Rev Dr Hester Jones and Rev Dr Chris Dingwall-Jones, as they seek to evolve and strengthen our ministries, as well as to the wider Ministry Team and the large number of volunteers who contribute in so many ways.

Children and Youth

Schools Ministry

Since starting the role in September my role has focused on leading collective worship; providing prayer and reflection spaces and supporting schools by providing seasonal services and activities.

Collective Worship and Assemblies have been provided to seven schools in our Benefice, alongside mainly clergy, every fortnight: The Batt, St Mary's Infants, St Kenelm's, The Windrush, Hailey, Queen Emma Community Primary, Witney Community Primary.

Prayer and reflection spaces have been held in Witney Community Primary school (January 2026) and in St Mary's Church for The Batt School and St Mary's Infant school (March 2026). These could not have happened without the support of a brilliant team of volunteers from across the Parish.

We provided Harvest services for The Batt and St Mary's Infants. We have also hosted Christmas concerts and services for Cokethorpe, The Batt, St. Mary's Infants, West Witney Primary and Hailey Primary School.

We hosted Easter services for The Batt and St Mary's Infants, Hailey Primary School (St. John's Hailey), and Witney Community Primary School (Holy Trinity Church) and I enjoyed going into Tower Hill School to talk to three classes about what Easter means to Christians.

It was a pleasure to be involved in compéring the Schools Making Music Concert in St. Mary's.

We also welcomed a class from St Kenelm's school into St Kenelm's church to find out more about a Christian church.

Kirsty Morgan, Schools Chaplain



Youth

A Ministry of Presence & Hope

Gen Z is facing a *loneliness epidemic*. The Youth Chaplaincy responds with presence, consistency, and genuine connection, offering safe spaces where young people feel seen, supported, and valued.

2025 Highlights

- Freshers' Fayre: 750–850+ students engaged across three campuses
- College Engagements: 1,243 student interactions (Sept–Dec)
- Practical support delivered: 185 meals, 20 food vouchers, 12 food parcels, 1 food bank referral. *Revealing significant hidden need among learners.*
- Work Experience Placements: Students completed 70-hour placements supporting: Toddler groups, Messy Church, Junior Church, Outreach & food provision and Mentoring resources.
- Learners gained confidence, safeguarding awareness, communication skills, and insight into youth work, social care, and community leadership.
- Enrichment Programme: 12 young people in Summer Programme, 15 students in Autumn Programme. Creative workshops, team-building, CV writing, job applications, interview prep. Support for students resitting English/Maths. Increased confidence, employability, and community connection

Looking Ahead: 2026–2027

- Secure funding for a permanent Youth Chaplain post
- Launch Witney Youth Café & Windrush Place Youth Café
- Embed Cherish Your Wellbeing & Enrichment Programme annually
- Expand detached youth work
- Grow volunteer team
- Strengthen employer partnerships
- Roll out Oxfordshire Youth Voice Toolkit

Conclusion

The Youth Chaplaincy is meeting a real and urgent need. The foundations laid in 2025 have positioned this ministry as a lifeline for young people seeking connection, stability, and hope. With continued investment, 2026–2027 will see this work grow into a flagship model of youth engagement and Christian presence across Witney.

Dianne Augustine, Youth Chaplain

Social and Climate Justice

Climate justice

We are a Benefice committed to protecting the environment and spreading the message about climate change and what can be done about it.

The Benefice Environment Group has recently changed its way of working and is now comprised of individual groups from St John's, Hailey, Holy Trinity and St Mary's, meeting at regular intervals to share our plans and swap ideas.

In the past year, we have again organised the River Blessing service, and marked Earth Overshoot day by a silent vigil on Church Green whilst the bell ringers rang a half-muffled peal.

We are also holding a monthly Vigil for the Earth, when we light a candle and pray for the problems the world is suffering. This is from 6.00–7.00pm on the third Thursday of each month at St Mary's (in the Winchester Room during the winter months!).

St Mary's and Holy Trinity are holding Litter Picks and tidying up the areas around each church.

St Mary's also supports Witney Eco Forum, an inclusive environmental group which meets monthly to hear speakers from different climate interest groups, and to encourage those who attend to work towards mitigating climate change, promoting climate justice, and helping to achieve Net Zero. WEF meets in St Mary's on the second Thursday of each month, you can find information about past and future speakers on the WEF website, www.wef.co.uk

Social Justice

Our work for social justice spans a variety of areas of Parish life, from our work with asylum seekers and refugees, to our support of those in need via our Hardship Fund and other initiatives. Much of this work relates to particular individuals in our community.

In 2025, we were pleased to renew our connection with Witney Pride, spearheaded by our former curate Ross Meikle. We ran a stall at the event, and many members of our congregations were present to enjoy the atmosphere, and to witness to God's delight in all people, especially those who have felt excluded by church communities.

Older People

Anna Chaplaincy

- Offers spiritual support to older people living alone or in care homes, their relatives and carers.
- Promotes the spiritual welfare of older people in the wider community, particularly those facing challenges living independently.

The past year has seen Anna Chaplains deepen their relationships both in individual homes and in the care homes of Millers Grange, Richmond Village, Cedar Court, Merryfield House and Middletown Grange.

We have grown our inclusive and age-appropriate services where requested, at Easter, Christmas and other times, also attending the communities' social activities, where we can offer support to families and staff. A special thanks goes to Rebecca Coatsworth who volunteered her pastoral gifts for some home visits this year.

Whilst many that we visit express their gratitude for the time that we offer, it has continued to be a joy for us to serve in this way.

Julia Bee and Dave Pizzey, Anna Chaplains



Teaching and Spirituality

Teaching and spirituality remain at the heart of our life together.

In addition to the regular rhythms of Morning and Evening prayer, which provide a spiritual foundation for the life of our Parish, this year members of the Benefice Environment Group have established a monthly 'Vigil for the Earth' as an open, non-prescriptive space to bring concerns about climate issues, as well as other issues affecting our shared home, into shared silence.

Occasional spaces for spiritual engagement included the celebration of Corpus Christi with a time of prayer and worship in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and the Stations of the Cross during Lent.

Our regular group exploring Christianity alongside Iranian refugees and asylum seekers continued throughout much of the year, and developed into a discussion group involving more people exploring faith. This included sessions exploring Rowan Williams's *Being Christian*, and a Bible Study group that explored the Book of Acts, among other texts and topics.

Talking Theology, our group for discussing important theological topics, included sessions on the novels of Barbara Pym, Theologies for Inclusion and Liberation, and Christian Iconography in Western Art.

In Lent, the discussion group and Talking Theology came together to explore key theological themes of confession, scripture, intercession and sacrament through the Eucharistic liturgy.

The daytime Nurture Group has continued to be an important source of development and challenge for those who attend it. Outreach on the Windrush Estate has led to a new Breakfast Church community exploring faith once a month at Windrush Church, as well as an Alpha-style house group for those with questions about faith.



Outreach

Waterways Chaplain

Rev Jacky Bone is one of more than 100 Waterways Chaplains serving across the country, offering care and support to those who live, work, or spend time along our canals and rivers. As a Waterways Chaplain, Jacky's role is simply to be present, approachable, and ready to listen.

Together with a wonderful team of volunteers from the Benefice, Jacky regularly walks the towpaths, meeting people from all walks of life – anglers, joggers, dog walkers, canal workers, and of course the boating community. These walks often end in the best possible way: with a visit to a local pub or café for refreshments and conversation!

Over the past year, the team has been able to offer practical help in many ways. They have delivered food parcels, supported boaters with housing and benefits applications, accompanied a boater to the Citizens Advice Bureau, helped people experiencing homelessness, and worked alongside Connections Oxford.

Most importantly, though, they spend time each week simply being there – wandering the towpaths across South Oxfordshire, chatting with people, offering friendship, and providing a listening ear.

If you would like to know more about this valuable ministry, or if you might be interested in joining the team of volunteers who occasionally accompany Jacky, please do get in touch.

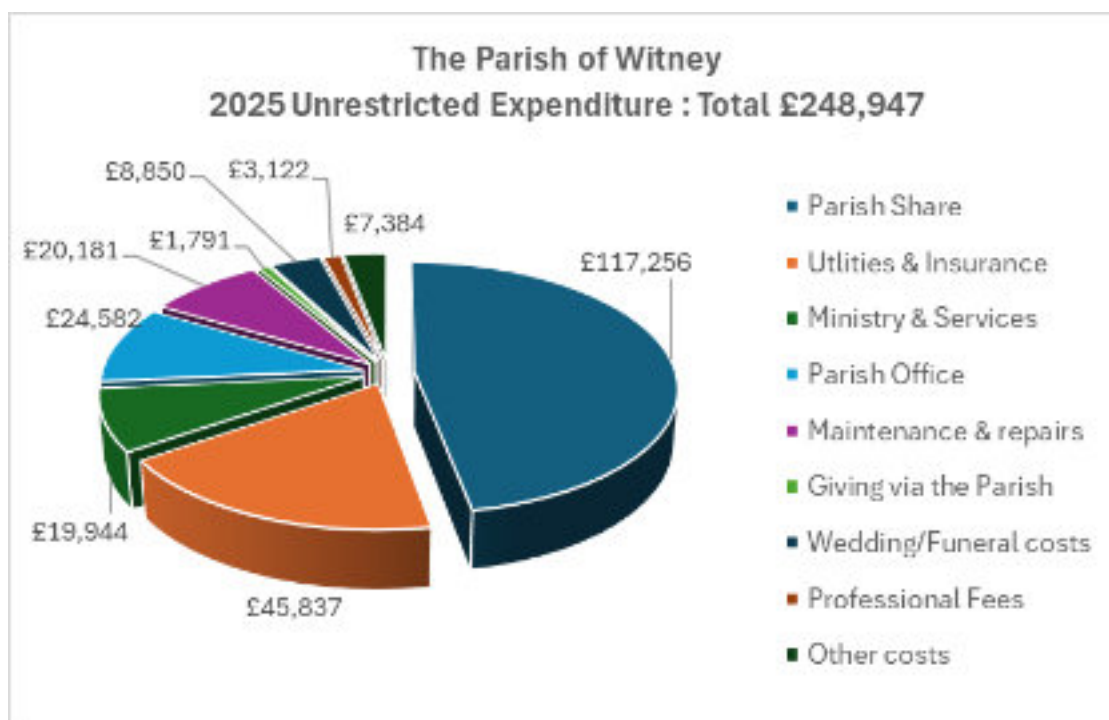
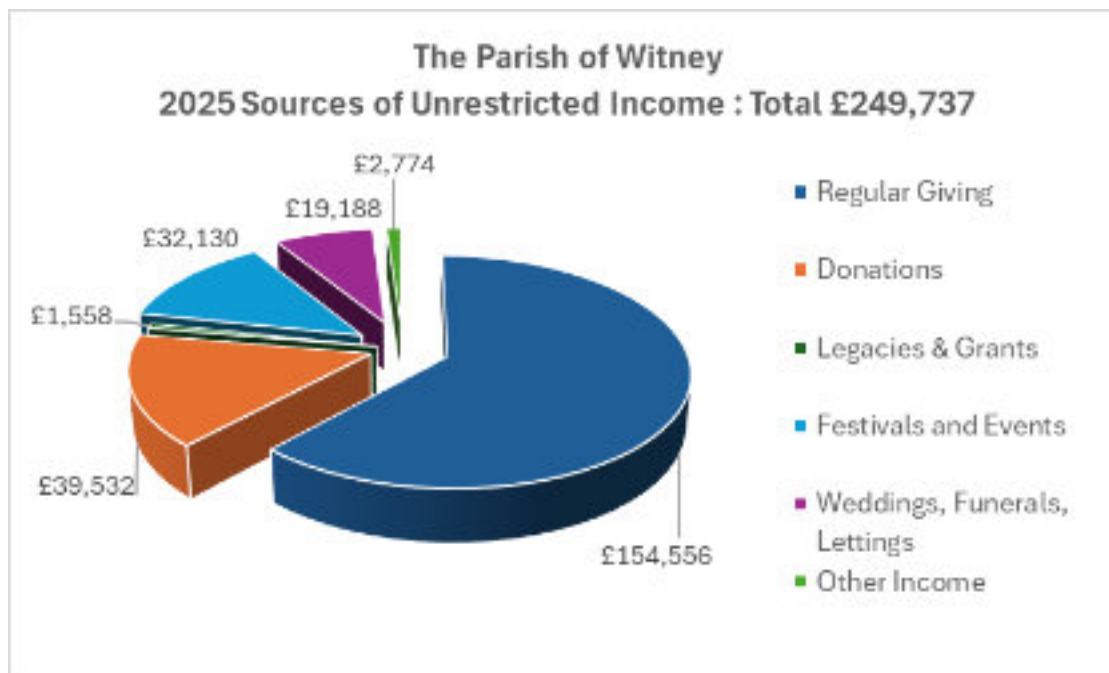


Festivals

WFOFAD continues to go from strength to strength. Visitor numbers increased again this year, alongside a rise in the number and variety of stalls, with the festival now welcoming more than 65 artisan producers. The event not only raised valuable funds for the parish but, perhaps more importantly, it offered an opportunity to open the doors of St Mary's and welcome in our community.



Financial Summary 2025



- Income for the year ended 31st December 2025 totalled £297,124, with total expenditure of £296,170. These totals include Restricted/Designated and Unrestricted Funds.
- Unrestricted income totalled £249,737, while costs amounted to £248,947, resulting in an operating surplus of £790.

- This result reflects the continued generosity of our congregations both in terms of regular giving and also in response to an appeal for one off donations to enable the Parish to meet its operating budget. This is the fifth year that such an appeal has had to be launched; donor fatigue resulted in a reduction in the amounts given (2025 £33,052 down from a peak of £56,004 in 2020).
- Total Congregational Giving (Regular Giving, Loose Plate Collections plus Gift Aid, but not Donations/Appeals) covers 62% of our running costs, up 3.7% on 2024. This reflects a steady improvement in regular giving from our congregations (up 3% from 2024) as well as reduced costs (see below).
- 2025 income benefitted from a number of highly successful festivals and events, but was lower than 2024 largely because we did not run an Open Gardens event (normally biannual) and we chose not to run an Oktoberfest event during the Witney Feast last year.
- Our operating costs decreased by 5% in 2025, despite the increase in our Parish Share allocation from 2024. This is as a result of a reduction in many cost categories, and in particular reflects renegotiated energy tariffs.
- Restricted income and costs were both substantially lower than 2024, reflecting the completion of the Holy Trinity roof project and the end of grant funding and salary costs for Laverne Williams, our full time Youth worker.

Jeremy Lasman, Treasurer



Witney Churchwardens' Report

Over the past year it has been wonderful to see the growth of the ministries of our Team Rector, Hester, and Team Vicar, Chris, both individually and also as they have worked together to support the continued flourishing of the Parish. We are hugely grateful for their energy, commitment, wisdom and prayerfulness as they have sought to develop and encourage the many initiatives that combine to make the Parish of Witney so vibrant, whether as a place for worship or contributing to the life of our town and its surroundings.

We continue to be thankful the work of the wider Ministry Team as well as the many volunteers, all of whom give their energy and time in support of the work of the Parish. The contents of this Annual Review provides a sense of the breadth and variety of the activities that have taken place over the past year, none of which would have been possible without the hard work of so many.

We are grateful for the work and leadership of our Deputy Wardens in each church. Andy Brown is standing down from St Mary's at the APCM as he has moved away from the area; we will miss Andy very much.

Linda Taft and Sue Hodges will be coming off the PCC as well because they are not standing for re-election to Deanery Synod, which gave them an ex-officio place on the PCC. We are very grateful for all they have done to represent the Parish on the Deanery Synod. Linda's eye for detail has been a great asset to the PCC, and Sue's dedication to the PCC, and work on the fabric of Holy Trinity, has been immensely valuable.

After 8 years as Parish Warden, Jeremy Lasman is also standing down this year, although he will remain as Treasurer. Jeremy has been a dedicated and active Warden, and his wisdom and commitment have helped steer the Parish through faculties, vacancies, festivals and building works! On behalf of the whole community, thank you Jeremy.

Kate Banks & Jeremy Lasman, Witney Churchwardens



Witney PCC Report

Since the last APCM in May 2025 the PCC has held four full meetings.

In the last 12 months:

- The Church Representation Rules Scheme has been updated to recognise the role of Windrush Church within the Benefice.
- DAC approval and faculty applications were submitted for repairs to the bell at Holy Trinity, and repairs to the stone crosses at Hailey. The PCC supported the Witney Ringing Society in faculty applications to install a peals board in St Mary's bell tower, and for the refurbishment and augmentation of the bells from 8 to 10 bells.
- The PCC has established a stewardship group to work towards more sustainable financial giving.
- The Health & Safety Policy; Safeguarding Policy; Fire Safety Policy; Complaints Procedure; Disciplinary & Grievance Procedure; Standing Committee Terms of Reference; and Witney Ringing Society Rules have been reviewed. All policies are available on the Benefice website.
- The PCC has monitored the financial position of the parish and each DCC; agreed the budget; and supported a parish appeal.
- New volunteers helping with activities for children, young people and vulnerable adults have been recruited through the Church of England Safer Recruitment process.
- The PCC has received regular reports from our Safeguarding Officer, and has monitored the Safeguarding Action Plan, and risk assessments for church buildings and activities.
- The PCC has approved the appointment of Eucharistic Assistants and welcomers in all the churches
- The PCC has received regular updates on the buildings and activities of each church; the work of our Youth Chaplain; our Schools Chaplain; Social and Climate Justice and more.

Kate Lockwood, Witney PCC Secretary

Fabric Reports

St Mary's

Last year was relatively quiet in terms of major works to the fabric of St Mary's. However, we remain extremely grateful for large team of volunteers who attend regularly to clean and maintain the church month by month; special thanks go to David Taft and Keith Holmes for all the various small building and improvement projects that they have completed, as well as to our verger, Chris Ward.

We have now received the completed quinquennial inspection report, which will allow us to develop a maintenance programme to preserve the fabric of the building, subject to the major challenge in terms of fund raising to progress this work. The recommendations of the 'Plan to net Zero' project, once confirmed, will need to be reflected into this overall maintenance plan, as will the impact on the doors project, which is awaiting final approval from the DAC and which will be financed, in part, from the restricted funds held in the St Mary's Appeal account.

Jeremy Lasman, Churchwarden

Holy Trinity

Final work has been completed, pertaining to the roof, when a specialist repaired and decorated the walls in the vestry following a damaging leak whilst the vestry roof was being re-slatted. The cost was met by Everest Roofing.

The rainwater drain to the foul sewer on the New Yatt Road is a pressing need, with significant expense attached to it.

Whites of Appleton have repaired and replaced parts of the bell which ceased to function a few years ago. This was made possible by some generous donations for which we are most grateful.

The new downpipes are in place but one is partially obscuring the air vent. Peter Preston has asked Everest to reposition. There are another couple of very minor things which need attention before the work can be signed off.

The organ maintenance continues with twice yearly tuning. Significant work is required to the instrument but at considerable cost. This remains in our minds.

Steven Clapton (R L Clapton Ltd) has been engaged to correct electrical faults, initially investigated by Lowe and Oliver. L&O's quotes to investigate the problem, not repair it, were prohibitive. All lights are now working again and surge protection installed where the supply comes into the church. Faults with Rako equipment have occurred over time. These have caused much inconvenience and expense as Rako is based in Kent. On the recommendation of Steve Clapton, Jay Watson was engaged to manage the lighting controls with Loxon replacing Rako. A temporary key pad is in place whilst Jay and Chris DJ are in discussion over scenes to be programmed.

The safe door/hinges, in vestry, were fettled by Jay Watson enabling the door to hang true.

Servicing of heaters, boiler, fire extinguishers and PAT testing of appliances are done as required.

Charlotte Tremain, Deputy Warden

Hailey

A new stonemason has been appointed to replace the Chancel Cross and also to look at the West End gable cross. This has been a longer than expected process due to work on site requiring warmer weather and we hope that work will start soon.

Unfortunately, we have experienced storm damage which has caused loss of guttering from the North side of the church and also the bell tower mechanism. There are plans for a short-term fix of the guttering before a long-term appeal to fix the guttering around the whole church as recommended by the Quinquennial inspection. The crack in the pulpit has been monitored and has not shown any significant movement.

Recent electrical works have replaced and repaired the spotlights in the Chancel.

The churchyard continues to be maintained by a group of committed local volunteers who make it a wonderful haven for wildlife and wildflowers.

Kirsty Morgan, Deputy Warden

Curbridge

St John's is facing challenges as its congregation ages. We are aware of the poor condition of the church path and the non-functioning church bell. The electrical system will need some work soon. The quinquennial is due before the end of the year and the cost of this will be a major burden. Otherwise, the church's fabric seems fairly good, with the roof secure and the stonework mainly sound. The churchyard is well maintained.

The congregation is undertaking a review of its activities in the light of its age profile and small numbers, and the ill health suffered by several members.

We regret there has been no external charitable activity in the last year.

Ian Galletley, Deputy Warden

Church Reports

St Mary's

Following the major ministerial changes over 2024/5 this has been a year of consolidation in St Mary's under the expert guidance of Hester and Chris, supported by the extended Team and wider support group.

Attendance appears to be growing with many new faces attending church services and associated activities throughout the year, with a packed St Mary's celebrating Easter Sunday on a beautiful sunny morning. Junior Church has continued to be offered every Sunday at St. Mary's to a regular group of children. We have a great team of leaders and helpers, but will need a few more to continue to provide Junior Church every week.

A major change during the year was the departure of Laverne Williams as Youth Chaplain as well as a change in Verger with Chris Ward stepping into the role alongside his support for Children's Church on Sunday mornings.

Laverne has been replaced by Dianne Augustine as Youth Chaplain resulting in the initial trial of the new Youth Café on a Friday evening in the Winchester Room, acting as a learning and coaching space for local schoolchildren after hours.

In addition, Kirsty Morgan has taken on the critical role of School Chaplain alongside Dianne to drive the out-reach from St Mary's into the local Witney schools. As a result of these appointments, St Mary's now has a full Ministerial and support Team in place, although Deputy Warden Andy Brown will be leaving due to his re-location to Cheltenham.

Within the church, there has been some successful changes to the infrastructure including the central seating positioning to be more focussed towards the altar when services are taking place, and feedback has been very positive.



To enable a better understanding of the history and aspects of St Mary's, new signage with interactive QBR codings have been deployed throughout the church, these guide the general public around the church including into the refreshed chapel locations.

As always, there have been a number of key events throughout the year including the Witney Beer, and the Witney Festival of Food and Drink, which will also take place again in May 2026, as well as multiple smaller fundraising events including Quiz Nights, Cakes sales, Music Concerts and many more, these activities are critical in helping fund both St Mary's and the wider parish as a whole.

In June 2026 the popular Open Garden weekend, including a church café over both days, will take place.

The Christmas celebrations were even more memorable than the previous year including delivering the "sing around the piano service" on two successive weekends, multiple school carol services all taking place in a beautiful but sensitively decorated St Mary's with multiple Christmas trees supplied and sponsored by local businesses.

And finally, as always, a big shout out to all the church support team of Acolytes, Sacristans, Thurifers, Intercessors and Preachers as well as the Welcomers, Flower and Coffee Teams, the Choir and many others who make the Warden's job so easy.

Holy Trinity

HT has had a successful year maintaining a weekly celebration of the Eucharist, with a robed choir. Thanks to our Rector and Vicar, retired clergy and assistant priests for enabling this and to Paul as organist, supported by the choir.

The pancake and quiz supper was held in aid of the Besom and the summer barbecue in aid of Helen House. Jay Watson gave a short but first-hand account of the work done at Helen House and how valuable it is for those who are beneficiaries of it.

Our coffee mornings continue to be a great success and are much enjoyed by the wider community. The significant sum of money raised at each goes towards running expenses.

In conjunction with the Methodist church a significant number of shoe boxes were filled with Christmas presents, under the Teams4U scheme, and were sent to children in East Europe who otherwise receive nothing at Christmas time.

Christmas hampers containing essential items, alongside Christmas fare, were created and distributed to families at WCP school.

Carol singing took place at Merryfield House before Christmas, followed by the popular community carol singing opposite The Three Pigeons.



A traditional service of Nine Lessons & Carols was held once again and well attended by people from the community. The choir sang carols in The Three Pigeons on the Wednesday before Christmas.

The leafletting of neighbouring roads, whilst time consuming, is hugely beneficial in keeping in touch with the community. It undoubtedly increases numbers at our Christmas services, in addition to our coffee mornings.

Clothes were collected by the congregation for The Gatehouse, a charity in Oxford, which assists in providing clothes mainly for men.

A community Christmas card was created, beautifully, by Agnes and Isaac for all to sign with donations being given to MIND. Thank you Agnes and Isaac.

Churchyard: wildflowers continue to be a joy although last summer produced fewer than in 2024. Our churchyard is considered to be the most successful of all the areas over which the Town Council has control, Angus believes because of the site being one of ancient woodland.

Ongoing exchanges with persons who repeatedly and wantonly disrespect and disregard the rules that the Town Council operates around dogs in cemeteries and churchyards continue. A number of people from the congregation have explained to them that the dog should remain on a lead but to no effect. The dog bounding across the ashes plot and individual graves causes understandable grief to those whose loved ones' remains rest in our churchyard. A sign is present on the railings indicating that dogs are welcome on leads.

Thanks are due to so many people for all the work which has been done in this church community throughout the year, some of which goes unnoticed but which is vital to our running and well-being. Thank you all so much.

We are sad that Sally Down has had to move into a care home, close to Oxford, to be nearer her family. She was an LLM here, a loyal and very regular member of the choir and of course, married to the late Bill Down.

We remember those whom we have loved and see no more. Roland Meredith (priest and former Rector) 2025
Sue Wyatt (member of the congregation & volunteer) 2025
Keith Webster (member of the choir) 2025
John Pratt (former Landlord at The Three Pigeons and undertaker) 2025

Claire Titcomb (priest) 2025 May they rest in peace

Charlotte Tremain, Holy Trinity Deputy warden

Hailey

Regular and popular annual events have continued throughout this year including:

- Great Big Green day with children's activities and refreshments
- Taking part in the village scarecrow trial
- Providing refreshments at Hailey Village Fete
- Lights and Tree of Remembrance
- Macmillan coffee morning

We have continued to enjoy our regular annual services including:

- Peace Service at the Peace Memorial on Delly Green
- Woodland Service at Breach Wood
- Harvest Service
- Service of Remembrance





At Christmas we enjoyed welcoming many visitors to the church for our Christingle service (with guest appearance from our giant orange), the Hailey School Christmas service and our popular Christmas Carol service.

Rev Chris has enjoyed taking Collective Worship at Hailey Primary School, as well as being involved in their Christmas tree collection walk and the blessing of the tree.

At Easter we welcomed many visitors to the church during Holy week, including a moving reflective service on Good Friday by Rev Joanna and a packed Easter Sunday morning service.

We continue to welcome residents of Middletown Grange to our Sunday morning services and hold our Thursday morning service there once a month. The village lunch which has been provided by members of the church in the Village Hall for 21 years served its last lunch in December 2025. It will be much missed by the community and also the generous donations that it made to the church funds. A huge thanks to all the volunteers who have made it possible over all the years.

This year we have been blessed with strong support from the Friends of Hailey Church who have organised several fundraising events in the church including:

- A Gardeners' Question time
- A Witney Blanket talk by Val Bu
- A wonderful and popular Christmas Tree Festival

They also applied for a grant to enable us to update our Nativity scarecrow scene which is placed out

Kirsty Morgan, Deputy V



Windrush

The mission of the Windrush Congregation is to reach out with love, mercy, and kindness to the communities of Windrush Place and Colwell Green. It has now been seven years since the first of approximately 1,800 homes were built, and our ministry continues to grow and develop alongside the estate.

As a fruitful partnership between the Baptist and Anglican churches, we have worked together throughout the year to establish regular Christian worship at Windrush Primary School. Our aim has been to offer worship that reflects the values of the Benefice while also being welcoming and engaging for those who seldom attend church.

Our monthly Sunday morning Messy Church continues to flourish, regularly welcoming between 25 and 30 children along with their parents and carers. During the year, we also introduced *Breakfast Church*, which offers a more liturgical style of worship alongside discussion and all-age participation. We are encouraged to see a growing number of regular attendees.

We currently have seven people taking part in a weekly Exploring Faith course, based on the well-known Alpha programme.

At Easter, we hosted an *Easter Fun Morning*, which proved both popular and enjoyable. Activities included making Easter gardens, creative crafts, and a reflection space where children and adults were able to pray quietly and talk together about the meaning of Easter.

During the summer, we organised weekly walks for mums and toddlers, and also provided a toddler play area at the District Council Play Day held on the estate.

Our annual Teddy Bears' Picnic took place in September and welcomed around 40 families, despite the rain!





At Halloween, we offered a *Light Party* as a positive alternative to other seasonal activities. Attendance was smaller than expected, but many who came were families with children who have additional needs, which has given us valuable insight for future planning.

Christmas celebrations included both a Christingle Service and a Carol Service, which were warmly received.

We continue to support the Windrush Allotments, working alongside those who manage the site and those who hold plots there.

The weekly *Windrush Choir* has grown to around 25 members and has become an important social and community group for people both on the estate and beyond. Alongside rehearsals, members organise regular social gatherings and offer one another strong mutual support through their WhatsApp group. A particular highlight of the year was an enjoyable ABBA Bingo Night at the COMO Lounge.

The *Windrush Place Community* Facebook and Instagram pages, run by church members, now connect with around 3,300 people.

Windrush C of E Primary School

We continue to work closely with Windrush Primary School through regular collective worship, Godly Play sessions with classes, reading support, and a weekly toddler group. The school is highly supportive of our ministry and actively promotes church events to families.

We are grateful that Bryce Staniland, one of our congregation members, serves as a governor of the school.

This year, the school received an excellent SIAMS inspection report, which specifically recognised the strong partnership between the church and school:

“Governors and leaders, including partnership with Windrush Church, ensure that the surrounding housing estate is included in school life. Joint projects such as Messy and Breakfast Church or the toddler group help families feel welcomed and develop a sense of belonging as they join a new community.”
(SIAMS Report, Windrush C of E School, February 2026)

Jacky Bone, Pioneer Minister



**It's church,
but a whole
lot messier!**

**Messy
Church**

**FUN, Craft, Food,
Songs, Bible
Stories**

**10:15-11:45 each FIRST Sunday of the month
@ The Windrush School
No need to book**

A blue poster for 'Messy Church'. The text is white and yellow. The logo 'Messy Church' is in white and yellow on a red splatter background. Below the text is an illustration of several hands holding colorful paint splatters. At the bottom, there is a small illustration of a table with various items on it.

Deanery Synod Report

Meetings were held in July, November and March.

In July, Darren Stevens spoke on Evangelism and ways to start conversations with people by stirring curiosity.

The Deanery Priorities are Environmental Action, Children, Young People and Families, Addressing Poverty, Inequality and Loneliness.

In November, Imogen Onwuka from Safe Families talked about the different ways we can engage with families and safe practices

In March we discussed accessing External Fundraising.

Martin Gee spoke about how to present a good budget. Jo

Mitchell related the wisdom of good story telling.

Joshua Townsend discussed seeking generous personal givers.

David Tyler then mentioned the Diocese Development Fund, how it can be accessed and what the reporting mechanisms are. The fund aims to encourage parishes and deaneries in five areas: To become a more Christ-like church, to encourage discernment, to be missionally active, to learn together and the support initiatives that are sustainable.

Sue Hodges, Deanery Synod member

Safeguarding

Over the last year the parish has continued to develop and review its safeguarding policies and practices for both in person and online events.

The Diocese encourages anyone who wants to, to undertake basic level training, this – along with foundation and domestic abuse level – is compulsory for PCC/DCC members, children’s workers and other roles.

We use the Parish Dashboard system to record much of this work.

Following an issue with our previous provider, the Diocese recommended we change our DBS provider to *Verifile*, this was done early this year.

Concerns have continued to be reported and dealt with as needed.

The PCC has complied with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016.

Alison Spicer, Parish Safeguarding Officer